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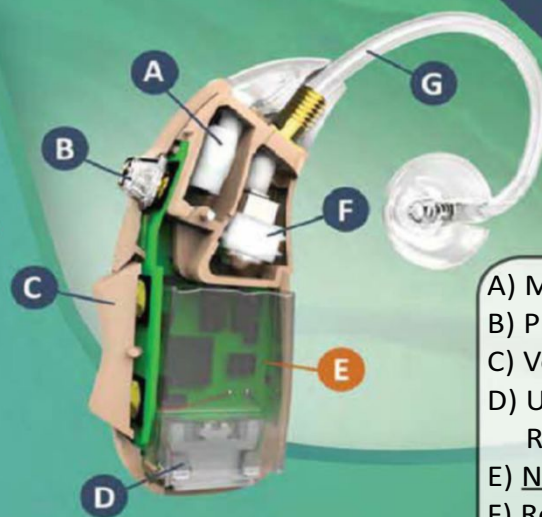


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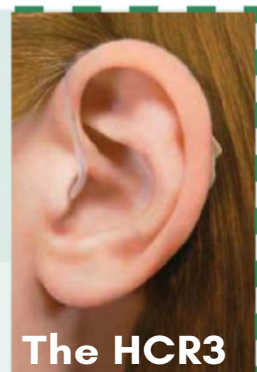
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American goldfinch
Photo by Steve and Dave
Maslowski

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It's normal for me

to leap up in the middle of a conversation to get a better look at a bird flying overhead or flitting about the trees. And more recently, I find myself hugely distracted by butterflies, too. Monarchs and red admirals are the most common fliers in my yard, but this issue, brimming with butterflies, has me watching for even more varieties amid my urban landscape these summer months.



Butterflies are small—some the size of a thumbprint—and they pause for only seconds at a time. This makes it difficult enough to glimpse the intricacies of their wings, never mind look long enough to identify a particular species.

Many stories in this issue will help boost your ID skills. See close-up views of the commonly confused American, painted and West Coast lady butterflies in “Garden Ladies” on page 16. Then indulge in a collection of reader photos and the stories behind the snapshots in “Butterflies in Focus” on page 32. And test your expertise in “Fluttering By” on page 60. See how many of the five species you can identify.

While you're out butterfly-watching this summer, keep your camera close, because it's time for our annual Backyard Photo Contest. Submit one photo per category—birds, butterflies, blooms—for a chance to win the \$1,000 grand prize. Find contest details on page 50 and at birdsandblooms.com/contests. I can't wait to see your best shots!

Kirsten

KIRSTEN SWEET, DEPUTY EDITOR

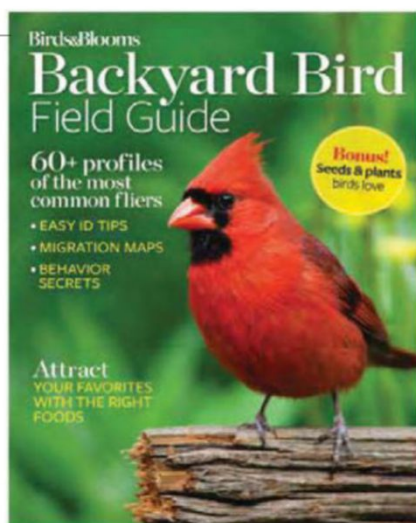
This Month

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Read

Look for our newest publication, *Backyard Bird Field Guide*, on a newsstand near you! Use it to help ID birds, recognize common behaviors and attract more of your favorite fliers.



Grow

Tara Steffen of Berne, Indiana, planted mums for fall color and was surprised by how many painted lady butterflies stopped to enjoy them.

BUY FRESH

Support your local markets this summer, especially during National Farmers Market Week, the first full week of August. Share your best finds at birdsandblooms.com/submit.

TRAVEL Go to the Henderson Hummingbird Hurrah, Aug. 17 in Henderson, Minnesota.

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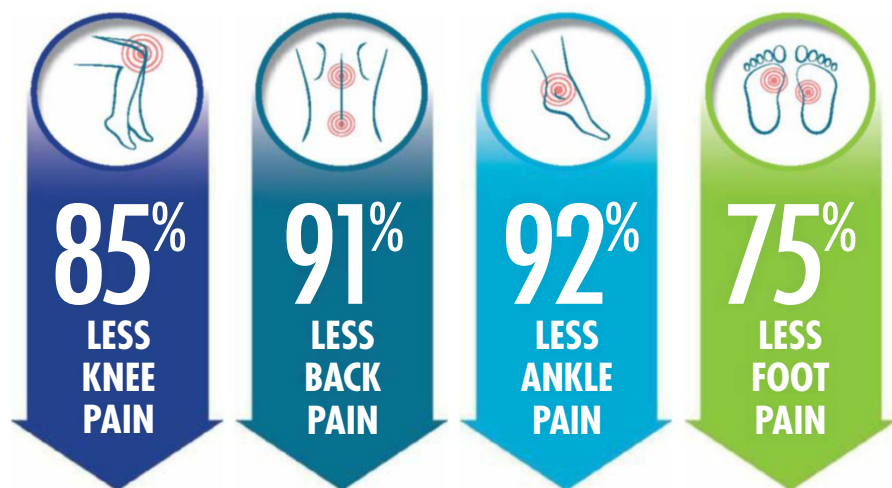
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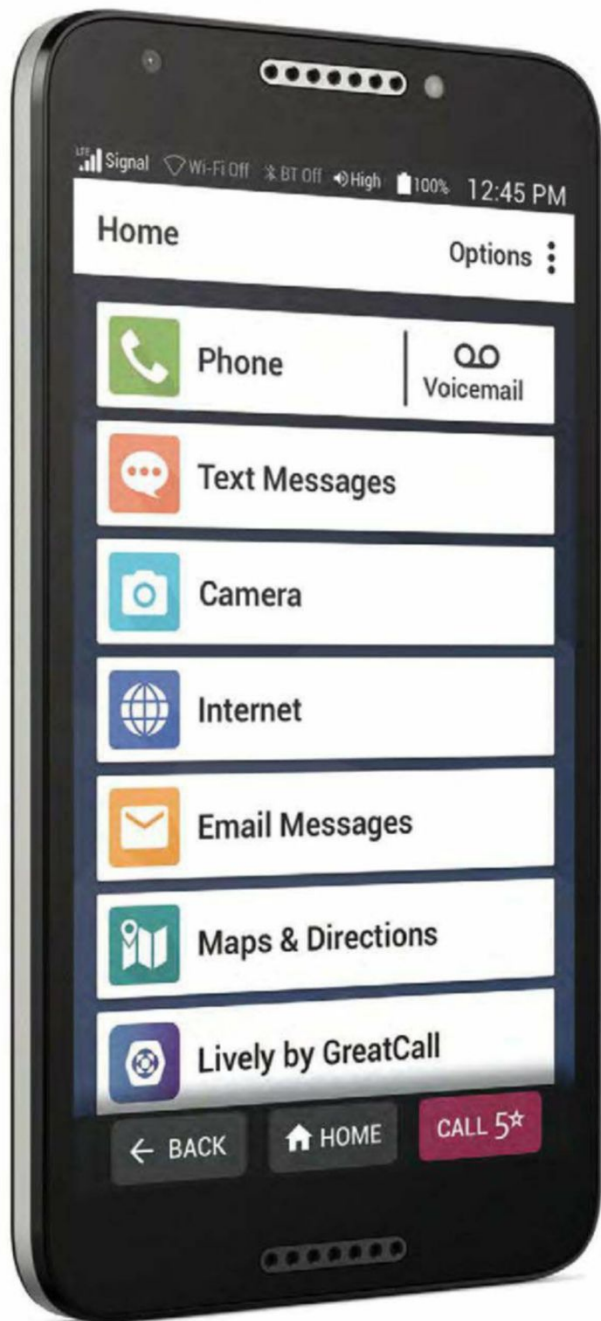
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Home, Sweet Home

Use milkweed to encourage butterflies to linger longer.

Adult eastern tiger swallowtails dine and lay their eggs on swamp milkweed.

Swamp Milkweed

Asclepias incarnata,
Zones 3 to 6

Perfect for filling out butterfly gardens, swamp milkweed is less aggressive than common milkweed yet has all the nectar benefits. It grows in challenging conditions, but prefers a sunny, moist spot. Blooms range from shades of pink to white.

Attracts: 🐦 🌸 🦋

Light needs: Full sun.

Size: Reaches 5 feet high and spreads 2 to 3 feet.

Grown for: Showy, fragrant midsummer flowers.

Foliage: Long, tapered leaves.

Cultivars to try: Ice Ballet dazzles with all-white flowers and darker green foliage, or host the belle of the ball with Cinderella's fuchsia blooms.

LATE BLOOMER

Goldfinches wait to breed until June or July, when milkweed and thistle seeds are plentiful. The birds use the seeds to build nests and feed their young.



The Golden Birds

Bring bright, thistle-loving beauties to your backyard. **BY KELSEY ROSETH**

Seeing a vibrant yellow American goldfinch at a feeder is enough to make any birder's heart skip a beat. Among the muted plumage of pine siskins, chickadees and sparrows, these bright beauties are a shock to the system.

"They are very striking," says Scott Gremel, a wildlife biologist at Washington's Olympic National Park. "They look like tropical birds."

Male and female goldfinches appear markedly different during breeding season, when males molt into bright yellow body feathers with black wings and cap and an orange bill. Juveniles and females are less colorful year-round. In winter, males have a dark bill and dull yellow body feathers, and look more like the females.

These feathered friends mainly eat seeds, cracking them open with their short bills. Favorite seeds include Njyer, thistle, black oil sunflower, alder and aster, among others. They also snack on buds, sap, the bark of young twigs, and occasionally insects.

To attract them to your yard, plant native thistles or milkweed. While goldfinches sometimes eat from the ground, they're adapted to pluck seeds from swaying flower heads and feeders.

Use tube feeders with short perches to encourage goldfinches and to discourage sparrows. Sock feeders also dispense tiny thistle seeds and are attractive to finches, pine siskins and chickadees.

American goldfinches' breeding range includes southern Canada all the way to northern Georgia and coastal California. In winter, they vacate the northern edge of this range, and flocks appear south to Florida and the Mexican border.

Goldfinches aren't under threat. Partners in Flight, a conservation organization, estimates a breeding population of 42 million. Found in cities and agricultural areas, "they are a species that has done well with human settlement," Scott says.

These active birds have bouncy, aerobatic flight patterns. They pair off during breeding season, but other times of the year, they may fly in flocks of 50 to 100. "If you see a weedy field full of thistle, sometimes there will be a huge flock of goldfinches," Scott says.

The in-flight call of the goldfinch sounds like *po-ta-to-chip*. Its other songs and calls are random series of warbles and twitters that last a few seconds, while its courtship call is a sharp *tee-yee* with a burst of song afterward.

After couples pair up and select a nest site in a bush or shrub—not too high off the ground—females build an open cup nest. It's woven with plant fibers and rootlets. The foundation is supported by spider silk, and the inside is lined with fluffy material taken from seed heads.

Most fledglings leave the nest 11 to 17 days after hatching, so by late summer you may see olive-colored youngsters at your feeders.

THE FEED



Goldfinches, like this female, perch on zinnias to eat the flowers' seeds.

HUGELY POPULAR

The American goldfinch is so widespread and beloved, it's the state bird of three states. You may hear people refer to these sunny finches as eastern or willow goldfinches, depending on where you are in the U.S.



We never had goldfinches visit until my family put out a thistle feeder. We had a pair within three hours. I love the pop of color they bring to my yard!

Jessica Paoletti

NEW CASTLE, DELAWARE

MULTIPLE MATES

A female typically selects one partner, though afterward she sometimes mates with another male.

FAVORITE FLOWERS

Goldfinches are especially drawn to the seeds of sunflowers, coneflowers, asters and grasses.

Invite More Butterflies

Colorful, easy-to-grow plants for a nectar-packed garden. **BY LUKE MILLER**



SWEET TREAT

A great spangled fritillary gets its nectar fix from a butterfly weed flower cluster.



1 Butterfly weed

ASCLEPIAS TUBEROSA,
ZONES 3 TO 9

Distinctive clusters of bright orange flowers are a must-stop destination for butterflies, especially monarchs and black swallowtails. After all, it didn't get its name for nothing. Butterfly weed grows 1 to 2 ½ feet tall and blooms from mid- to late summer. It tolerates dry soil and prefers plenty of sunshine.

Why we love it:

The showy bright orange blooms are deer resistant and drought tolerant, and butterfly weed is easy to grow from seed and super resilient—a major win!

2 Cleome

CLEOME HASSLERIANA,
ANNUAL

This old-time garden favorite, also called spider flower, gets its common name from the long and threadlike flower stamens and elongated seedpods. Cultivars come in white, pink, rose or purple flowers and quickly reach 5 to 6 feet tall. Newer cultivars, between 12 and 18 inches tall, are suitable for containers.

Why we love it: Cleome is a bright, resilient flower that readily self-seeds new generations. In addition to butterflies, bees and hummingbirds also love it.



3 Pentas

PENTAS LANCEOLATA, ANNUAL

If you like butterflies, you simply must grow pentas. These bright annuals, also known as starflowers, are easy to spot from afar. Just look for the large clusters of starlike flowers in bright pinks, reds and whites. They're full of nectar and real butterfly magnets. And aside from being frost sensitive, they're pretty hardy. Shorter cultivars work well in pots, while taller pentas can be interspersed with other companions in beds.

Why we love it: It's an annual that has the size and presence of a perennial.

DRINK UP *To eat, an adult butterfly lands on a flower, uncoils its proboscis (a strawlike tube that is hidden away when not eating), and dips it into the center of the bloom.*

The proboscis is long enough to reach the very bottom of tube-shaped flowers.



4 Meadow blazing star

LIATRIS LIGULISTYLIS, ZONES 3 TO 8

While any liatris attracts pollinators, spindly meadow blazing star is one of the monarch butterfly's absolute favorite nectar sources. The long-lasting flowers range from rose to purple and appear in late summer on stalks reaching 4 to 6 feet high.

Why we love it: Very showy flowers pop up late in the growing season when color is needed; tall plants make butterfly viewing easy.

TOP 10



5

5 New Jersey tea

CEANOTHUS AMERICANUS, ZONES 3 TO 8

This tough little shrub sneers at dry, rocky soils and drought, thanks to thick roots that penetrate deeply into the soil. The dried leaves were once used as a tea substitute in Colonial times, but New Jersey tea has a different purpose today. Grown for cover on rocky sites, it offers butterfly-attracting flowers in late spring.

Why we love it:

Compact and easy to grow, it's resistant to pest and disease problems.



6

6 Phlox

PHLOX SPP., ZONES 3 TO 9

Grow several forms of phlox for big impact, from the spring-blooming ground cover moss phlox (*P. subulata*) to the lanky summer stalwart garden phlox (*P. paniculata*).

Growing different phlox species extends the butterfly season—and gives you more flower colors, including white, pink, purple, lavender and bicolors.

Why we love it: Many phlox are fragrant, and some are even resistant to powdery mildew.



Sky Blue
Marvel salvia

7

7 Salvia

SALVIA SPP., ZONES 3 TO 10 OR ANNUAL

Whether you're growing the popular bedding annuals or a taller perennial type, salvia never fails to impress—or to attract butterflies, hummingbirds and bees. Fortunately, it's got true staying power, and even some perennial types have long-lasting flowers. Salvias are very forgiving and easy to grow, tolerating drought and clay soil.

Why we love it: Brightly hued flower spikes stand out among companion plants.

A BUTTERFLY HAVEN *Keep butterflies happy! Grow plants that bloom at various times throughout the season—they prefer red, yellow, orange, pink and purple flowers. Set out flat stones in sunny spots where they can warm their wings and rest.*



8

8 Swamp milkweed

ASCLEPIAS INCARNATA, ZONES 3 TO 9

Like other milkweeds, it doesn't look like much—until it blooms. Then you're treated to bright purplish pink flowerheads rising 5 feet in the air. You can't miss them and, fortunately, neither can the butterflies. The foliage is also a critical food source for monarch caterpillars.

Why we love it: It features a long bloom time and impressive size, and grows well in wet sites.



9 Coreopsis

COREOPSIS SPP.,
ZONES 3 TO 9

Some cultivars have rose, white or bicolor flowers, but coreopsis is known to go for the gold—offering a preponderance of golden yellow flowers in summer. Keep it deadheaded for continuous color. Some species bloom in early summer, others in late summer. Plant both types to keep the butterflies coming all season long.

Why we love it: Find it in various heights to fit everything from diminutive rock gardens to tall prairie plantings.

MORE PICKS FOR BUTTERFLIES

Ageratum
Amsonia
Black-eyed Susan
Butterfly bush
Calendula
Cosmos
Goldenrod
Heliotrope
Joe Pye weed
Lantana
Purple coneflower
Sedum
Sunflower



10 Aster

ASTER OR SYMPHYOTRICHUM SPP., ZONES 3 TO 10

These hardy perennials make a great companion to mums and offer late-season sustenance to butterflies, particularly fall-migrating monarchs. The nectar-rich, daisylike flowers come in a range of vibrant colors, including white, purple, blue and pink. Sizes vary from 1 to 4 feet, depending on species and cultivar.

Why we love it: Aster is simple to grow, drought tolerant and full of color in late summer and early fall, when other perennials are spent.

Luke Miller surrounds his vegetable garden with tall zinnias, which captivate butterflies but tend to confuse deer.

ESSENTIALS

KEY TO ID

Four small eyespots dot the underside of hindwings.

PAINTED LADY

When the wings are open and folded down, look for salmon orange markings with white and black areas, plus five white spots on the black part of each forewing.

When painted ladies migrate, the groups are sometimes so massive that they show up in radar images.

Garden Ladies

Find out how to tell these strikingly similar fliers apart.

KEY TO ID

Two large, bold eyespots grace the underside of each hindwing.

AMERICAN LADY

Wings unfold to reveal yellow and orange patterns, and the forewings have a black patch and a white bar at the wing edge. Look for a small white spot within the orange patch—it's a key field mark that its close relative, the painted lady, lacks.



WEST COAST LADY

Identify this lady by its squared-off wing tips and four small blue eyespots on the hindwing. Find it from Southern California to Washington and within the western half of the U.S.

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MAKE IT!

Set hydrangeas in a vase without water. Once they're dry (this will take about a week), attach the stems to a wreath form with floral wire.

Easy Ways to Dry Flowers

Create everlasting bouquets and decorations by preserving summer blooms. **BY SALLY ROTH**



Drying flowers is easy—it's remembering to actually cut them that is a challenge. Just before your favorite flowers reach their peak, think about how you might use a dried version of them, whether it's for classic indoor wreaths and arrangements or a decoration on your favorite straw hat.

Pick flowers for drying in the early afternoon on a sunny day, when their water content is lowest. Collect blossoms right at their peak—any older and the petals may drop as they dry—and play around with these simple drying methods.

FORGET THE WATER

If you've ever forgotten to add a little extra water to a vase, you may have already succeeded at the easiest method of drying flowers—simply deprive them of water. Now do it deliberately! Clip a small handful of stems, remove any leaves, and put them loosely in a vase without water. Even huge dinnerplate dahlias dry in about one week.

HANG TIGHT

The stems of some flowers may droop before drying if you leave them standing in a waterless vase. Keep blooms' upright posture by hang-drying them. Tie several stems together with twine or a rubber band and hang the bunch upside down away from sunlight, which fades the blossoms. They will dry in a few weeks.

SPEEDY SILICA GEL

Moisture-absorbing silica gel requires a little more effort than other methods, but flowers dried this way look more like their fresh versions, with their natural shapes and colors preserved.

To get started, buy a tub of silica gel crystals at any craft store, and find a microwave-safe container with a lid.

Clip off all but an inch of the flower stems. Pour a 1-inch layer of the crystals into the container. Place the fresh flowers on top, right-side up, and add another inch-deep layer of crystals. Snap on a tight-fitting lid, wait two to five days, depending on the size and thickness of the flowers, then carefully uncover your buried treasure and shake off any loose crystals.

Speed up the process by microwaving the dish, uncovered, for a couple of minutes on medium

power. The time varies, depending on flower size and the wattage of your microwave, so feel free to experiment with it.

Once the blooms have reached the dryness you desire, remove the dish from your microwave (caution: hot!), snap on the lid, and let cool before opening it again.

Attach a wire stem to the blooms or glue them into place on a wreath, in a shadowbox, or wherever you want to show off your preserved flowers.

Whichever method you choose, now is the time to start making memories. The summer garden is brimming with beauties to experiment with!

BEST BLOOMS FOR DRYING

VASE DRY

Baby's breath
Dahlia, multi-petaled types
Geranium
(*Pelargonium*)
Hydrangea
Pussywillow
Rose

HANG DRY

Artemisia, foliage
Chive flowers
Globe thistle
Gomphrena
Lamb's ears, flowers or foliage
Larkspur

Lavender
Marigold
Oregano, flowers and foliage
Rose
Sage, foliage
Salvia
Yarrow

SILICA GEL

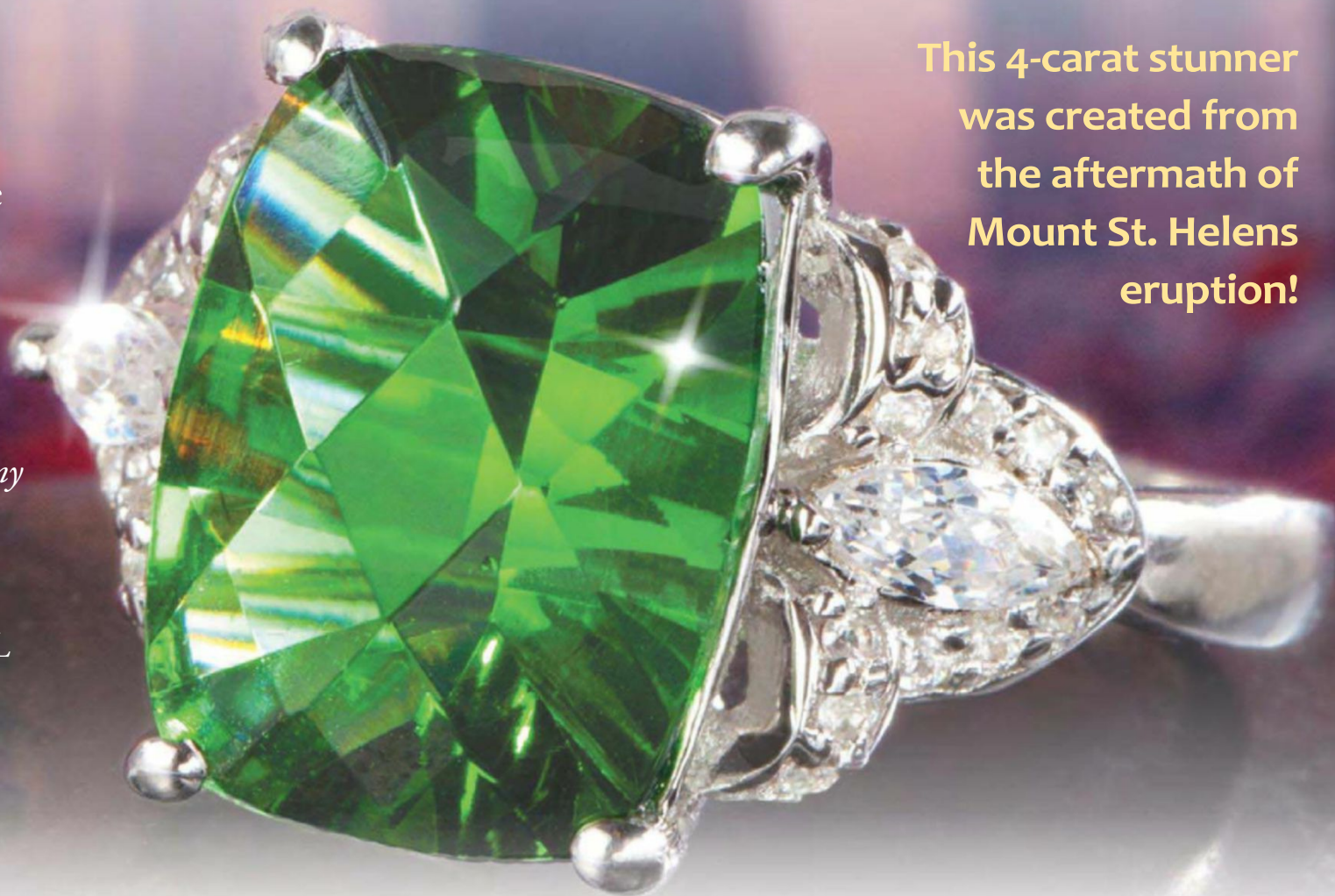
Black-eyed Susan
Coneflower
Dahlia, daisy types
Gerbera daisy
Pansy
Rose
Zinnia

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"My wife received more compliments on this stone on the first day she wore it than any other piece of jewelry I've ever given her."

— J. from Orlando, FL

This 4-carat stunner was created from the aftermath of Mount St. Helens eruption!



FAMOUS VOLCANO HAS STRANGE EFFECT ON WOMEN

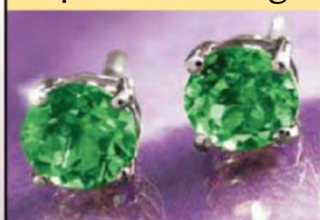
Man and nature collaborate to create a glamorous green ring guaranteed to rock her world! Own it today for **ONLY \$99 plus FREE studs with ring purchase!**

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Stars of Summer

Colorful hummingbirds and other unexpected sightings are the highlight of the season.



A ruby-throated hummingbird at a hardy hibiscus bloom shows you just how small this bird is! Last year was my first attempt at growing hibiscus, but it is pretty hardy and should come back year after year, even here in Indiana.

Carol Holliday
TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA

EASY ID

If you spot a hummingbird and you're east of the Mississippi River, it's most likely a ruby-throated. It's the only hummingbird species that breeds in the eastern half of the U.S.

BIRD TALES

Dickcissels

prefer tall grassland habitat. The Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge in Prairie City, Iowa, is one of the best spots to find them during the breeding season. A dickcissel's song is part of the sound of summer here in Iowa.

Douglas Lambert
DES MOINES, IOWA



ON THE MOVE

Dickcissels shift their range. In some habitats, they may be common one summer and rare the next.



Although the red-eyed vireo

is a common summer resident here in Kentucky, it's a rare treat to actually spot one. This bird was in a wooded area near my home, munching on something yellow for breakfast.

Liz Tabb
ELIZABETHTOWN, KENTUCKY



Seeing six

juvenile eastern bluebirds in our birdbath was a dream come true! We first spotted bluebirds in our yard in 2015. My husband built a birdhouse for them at my urgent request, and they nested here in 2016. Ever since, bluebirds regularly visit the bath, but we've never seen so many at once!

Brenda Crouse

SOMERVILLE, NEW BRUNSWICK



I took this photo last year

in a friend's yard. I love hummingbirds and have some in my garden, but my friend has many more than I do. The male ruby-throat was the only one of his species I saw that day in May—the rest were black-chinned. I took several hundred photos, and when I got home I was thrilled to see that I had captured this fabulous shot. **Johnny Bliznak** ABILENE, TEXAS

**During
last year's
Fourth of
July parade,**

a co-worker noticed a hummingbird in its nest on a very low branch. With so many people sitting under it and walking nearby, we were amazed it did not fly off.

We checked that nest every few days until the babies left. I like to call this shot "Full House."

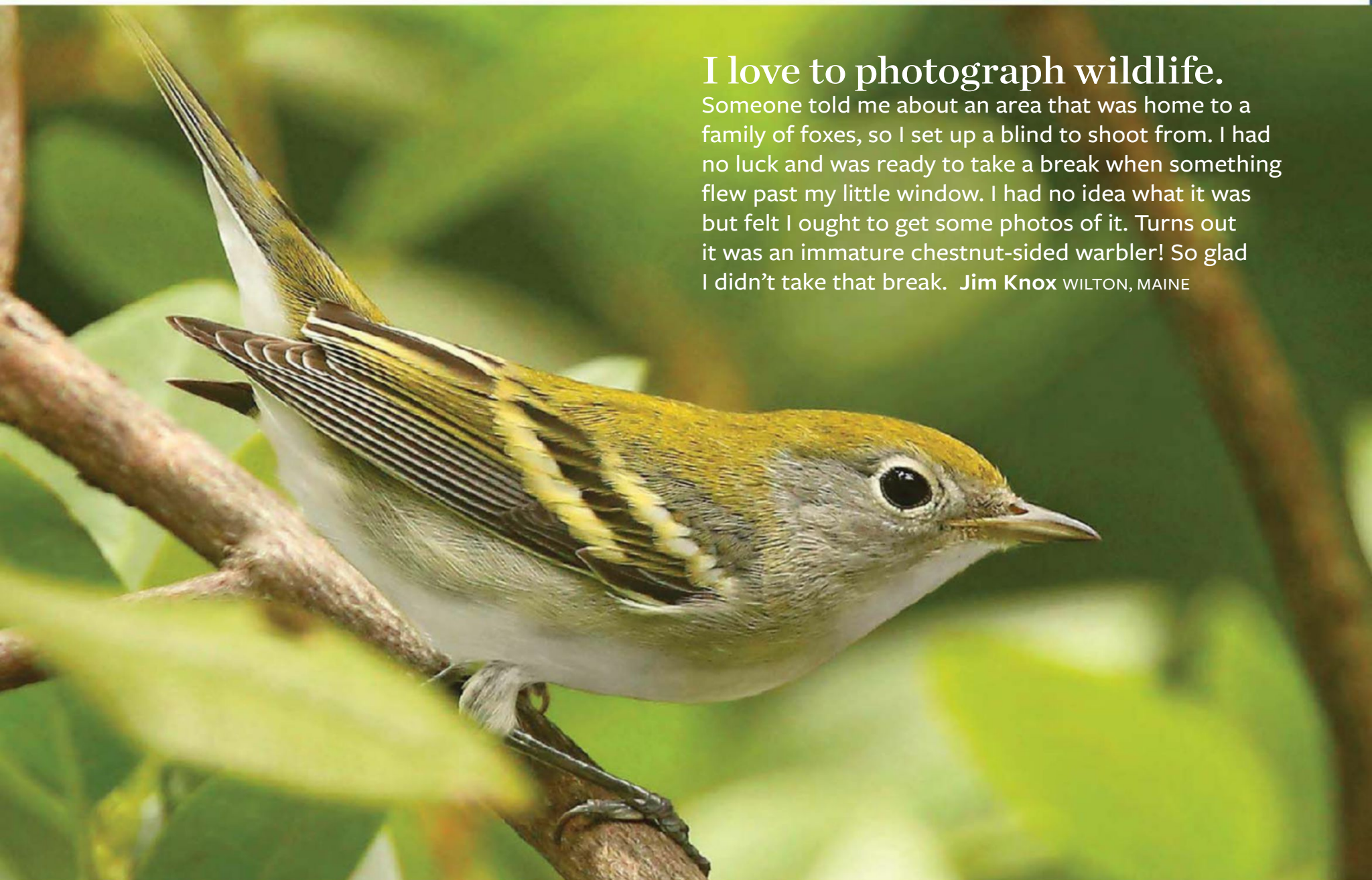
Deb DeCosta

HARWICH, MASSACHUSETTS



I love to photograph wildlife.

Someone told me about an area that was home to a family of foxes, so I set up a blind to shoot from. I had no luck and was ready to take a break when something flew past my little window. I had no idea what it was but felt I ought to get some photos of it. Turns out it was an immature chestnut-sided warbler! So glad I didn't take that break. **Jim Knox** WILTON, MAINE





Three pairs of vermillion

flycatchers worked the edges of a park near my home, swooping in to catch gnats and other tasty bugs. Each pair seemed to have its own section—a circuit of favorite perches on low tree branches. This bird returned time and time again to perch not 10 feet from where I stood with my camera. Vermilions are great fun to watch! Their amazing acrobatics show off its brilliant red head and breast feathers with every twist and turn.

James Capo

ORO VALLEY, ARIZONA

While visiting

a local park in Phoenix, Arizona, I noticed this male Costa's feeding among the hummingbird bush flowers. It was a bright, sunny day, which allowed me to use a fast shutter speed to freeze the hummingbird in flight.

Hayley Crews

PLACERVILLE, CALIFORNIA



Perfectly Imperfect

A stunning sight, this black-chinned hummingbird is leucistic, which means it's missing pigments in its feathers.



Discover why birds develop
surprising and irregular feather colors.

Plumage

BY KENN AND KIMBERLY KAUFMAN

Melanin pigments in this bald eagle's feathers are low, resulting in an appearance that's pale brown instead of dark brown.





SEEING BIRDS PARADE such colorful feathers is one of the greatest joys in watching winged visitors. The hues and patterns of their plumage are both decorative and practical, making them gaudy enough to attract mates or subtle enough to blend into their surroundings. Plumage is also a reliable way for bird-watchers to recognize different species.

Sometimes, though, a bird has a very unusual feather pattern—one that is not quite how it's supposed to look or doesn't match up with the pictures in the book. Such striking and surprising colors have a number of causes. If you know what makes these odd variations possible, it's exciting, not confusing, when you spot one.

FLASHES OF WHITE

A flock of robins gather on the lawn and among them is a bird that looks similar, but with big patches of white. A flock of house sparrows flies past, and there's an all-white bird with them. Are they some rare visitors?

No, they're just individuals of the same kind that lack normal pigments in their feathers.

Most of the black, gray, brown and reddish brown tones in feathers are created by pigments called melanins. If these pigments are missing, feathers may grow in pure white. Birds might have just a few white feathers, large random spots of them—or they might



look completely white. All of these individuals are known as leucistic. Their appearance may throw you off at first, but with careful study, you can identify most by their shape and behavior, and if they're flocking with others of their own kind.

Spotchy white birds are sometimes called partial albinos, but scientists disagree on whether this is a valid term. A true albino bird lacks all pigments, including in its eyes. So it would have white feathers and pink eyes (from blood vessels showing through). Genuine albinos rarely live long in the wild, so birders don't see them often. It's generally safe to assume that a white or partly white bird is leucistic.

In contrast, while a lack of melanin leads to white feathers, it is also possible for birds to have an excess

A leucistic female northern cardinal shows touches of red in all the usual places, but the dark brown pigments are absent, especially on her head.





A 1-year-old male indigo bunting has molted into spring plumage—a patchy mix of brown and blue feathers.



of dark pigment. Extra dark, or melanistic, individuals are fairly common in some hawk species, and it's part of their normal variation. For most songbirds, however, melanistic plumages are very rare.

A RANGE OF HUES

Red, orange and yellow feathers are usually created by other kinds of pigments called carotenoids, which are often independent of melanins. So a leucistic red-winged blackbird might have white plumage where melanin is missing from the black feathers

but still show typical red and yellow pigment in the wings.

Carotenoid colors often show odd variations, too, as in the rare male northern cardinals that are bright yellow instead of red.

Diet affects carotenoid pigments. For example, male house finches are usually bright red on the chest, but if they have a poor diet, their new feathers grow in orange and yellow. And if cedar waxwings eat the fruits from certain exotic plants, the tips of their tail feathers are known to turn red instead of the usual yellow.



BALDING BIRDS

If you've ever spotted a northern cardinal or blue jay with a mostly bald head, the bird isn't sick—don't worry! It is simply suffering from tiny parasites that cause some feathers to fall out. Most birds survive and grow back a full head of feathers in a few weeks.

COSTUME CHANGE

Sometimes birds show unique color patterns for a while simply because they're changing from one set of feathers to another.

As a very general rule, a healthy wild bird replaces all its feathers at least once a year, just a few at a time, in a process called molt. The new feathers are often the same colors as the ones they're replacing, so the effect isn't obvious. But some species change colors with the seasons, or as they become adults. When those birds are partway through the molt, they can look very odd, with patterns unlike any picture in a field guide.

Look for male American goldfinches to see an example of the process. In spring and fall they molt their head and body feathers, going from drab, buffy brown to brilliant gold and then back again. The process takes at least a couple of weeks and while it's happening, they wear an ever-changing coat of color.

Something similar happens with other birds that change with the seasons. Adult male indigo buntings are blue in summer, and mostly brown

in winter, and a mix when they're in their first year or in molt. Male scarlet tanagers trade their vibrant summer red for a winter costume of olive green, and they wear a mix of both in between. Adult male summer tanagers are bright red all year, but 1-year-old males are unevenly splotched as adult red starts to replace their baby olive.

TEMPORARY FLAIR

Sometimes a bird sports unusual colors simply because birds are...well, messy. They get into things and get discolored. It may be obvious, like when a wading bird has mud on its belly. But the stains come from their diet too. Birds feeding on ripe berries or small fruits may have a face stained blue, purple or black. Birds that prefer nectar can be dusted with flower pollen. It's common to see a hummingbird with tints of yellow or orange on its face where pollen has stuck to its feathers.

Whatever the cause for discoloration, some birds just don't follow the dress code. Finding such a unique individual is a highlight for anyone who loves the variety of birdlife. ●

Kenn and Kimberly Kaufman keep a sharp eye out for unusually colored birds during migration seasons around their home in the Magee Marsh area of Ohio.



Butterflies IN FOCUS

Readers captured the brief moments
when these fast-flying garden guests
paused among summer foliage.

*This American lady visited my
garden a few summers ago. I love this close-up because
it shows the intricate details of the butterfly's wings and
eye. The purple coneflower also provides an interesting
contrast to the blue-green background.*

Katerina Kretsch BRISTOL, CONNECTICUT

I took this photo

of a skipper the summer I got my first digital Canon DSLR. I never knew what these tiny butterflies looked like up close! It was neat to catch all of the details, such as the way the light shines on its eye and proboscis and through its wings.

Gina Howell

HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA



Sunflowers

always seem to please everyone, from squirrels to grackles, goldfinches and chickadees. On this particular day, three monarchs went from bloom to bloom, enjoying the flowers. It reminded me that I don't have to leave my yard to experience the beauty of nature.

Mary-Ann Ingrao

ANGOLA, NEW YORK

*Royal and
magnificent*

are spot-on descriptions for the regal fritillary. I took the photo as this one sipped nectar from a butterfly weed in my backyard. This visitor is becoming scarce because of a decrease in habitat, making the sighting even more special.

Gail Huddle

McPHERSON, KANSAS



It's challenging to photograph

butterflies that are constantly on the move, so when this cabbage white finally landed on my butterfly bush, I took advantage of the opportunity. It may not have the colors and patterns of some fellow fliers, but I think it has a beauty all its own. **Barbara Houlihan** MADISON, WISCONSIN



I captured

this photo of a white peacock butterfly with my Canon EOS at the Brookfield Zoo near Chicago. It was my first time checking out the butterfly exhibit there, and all the different kinds were amazing!

Heidi Kelly

PLAINFIELD, ILLINOIS



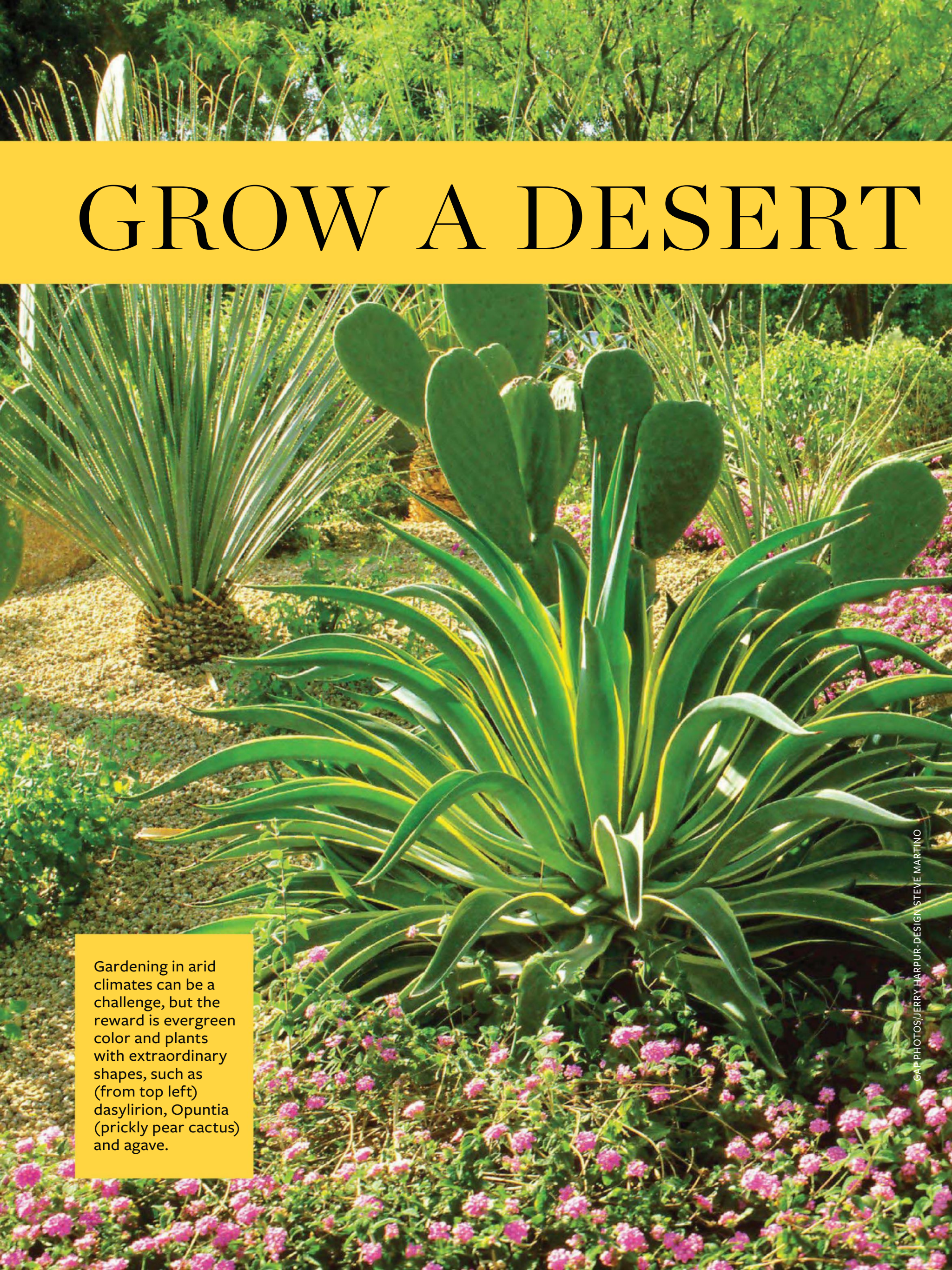
An eastern tiger swallowtail

eluded me the first time one visited our garden, and I lost my chance at a photo. But another one was gracious enough to come and stay awhile. I took many shots and captured this special moment with a sunflower.

Elisabeth Stuart COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

**SEE YOUR PHOTO IN
BIRDS & BLOOMS!**

We love to show off our past contest entries, like the ones here. Go to page 50 to learn how to share your best pics.



GROW A DESERT

Gardening in arid climates can be a challenge, but the reward is evergreen color and plants with extraordinary shapes, such as (from top left) dasylirion, Opuntia (prickly pear cactus) and agave.



Oasis

Easy ways to combat drought, extreme temperatures and rock-filled soil. **BY JILL STAAKE**





This classic desert landscape features a concrete staircase with a mass planting of drought-tolerant echeveria on each side. A brugmansia tree is a focal point in the back.



Found across the Southwest, prickly pear cactus supports wildlife, including nesting cactus wrens.

WHEN YOU PICTURE THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST, you may see dusty, windswept deserts that stretch for miles, with a lone cactus and occasional tumbleweed to break the monotony. That's certainly one version.

Gardeners in the Southwest see another image—one that's filled with the beautiful blooms of hardy native plants, drawing hummingbirds and butterflies. They know it takes hard work to get there, but they also know it's worth it.

"So many people are eager to learn about sustainable gardening," says Marisa Thompson, urban horticulture specialist at New Mexico State University (NMSU). "All over the region, people attend classes to understand a little more about water usage, drought stress, soil health, beneficial insect populations (including pollinators), species selection and wildlife habitats."

Here are the most valuable lessons they learn.

HOT AND COLD

The Challenge: In Phoenix, Arizona, summer high temperatures average over 100 degrees. But just 150 miles to the north in Flagstaff, the average winter lows are in the teens. Desert weather is harsh, and many gardeners in the Southwest have to contend with both scorching heat and frigid cold, along with scant rainfall even in the monsoon season that runs mid-June through September.

The Solution: Find the right plants for the right places. "Native and adapted plants that can tolerate our soils, arid environment and weather are a good way to maximize your landscape success and enjoyment," suggests retired horticulturist Curtis Smith on the NMSU Desert Blooms blog. Local county extension offices and native



Sassy Summer
Sunset yarrow
tolerates drought
yet offers clusters of
fiery-hued blooms.

DROUGHT GARDENING ADVICE

Save water when your landscape is at its driest.

- Water only perennials and edibles; skip the annuals that can be replaced next year.
- Use targeted irrigation early or late in the day to lose less water to evaporation.
- Replace grass with more drought-friendly solutions.
- Save rainwater in a barrel or other large container if it's allowed in your area.
- Add a heavy layer of mulch around plants to keep more moisture near the roots.

plant nurseries also offer invaluable recommendations for any garden, no matter what environment you plant in.

The Rewards: Southwestern natives produce flowers and foliage that rival their relatives around the country, and many have wonderful wildlife value. Native wildflowers and shrubs attract butterflies, hummingbirds and bees; even cacti support animals and birds like the cactus wren.

DRY AS DUST

The Challenge: Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Atlanta, Georgia, both experience hot summers and mild winters. But while Atlanta receives an average of 47 inches of rain a year, Albuquerque makes do with a paltry 9 inches, most of that in the summer monsoon season. Any time of year, water is a treasured commodity in the Southwest.

The Solution: It's super common for southwestern gardeners to use efficient, targeted irrigation like soaker hoses and micro sprayers. Water is too valuable (and expensive) to waste, so irrigation needs to get straight to the roots where it's needed. "Mulch is key!" Marisa says. "Mulching helps insulate

plant roots and maintains soil moisture in both winter and summer. Not to mention, mulch makes a fantastic weed barrier."

The Rewards: Where the sun shines nearly every day, gardeners have plenty of time to enjoy the unique fruits of their labors. Plants that thrive there boast brilliant blooms and unique textures, all the more impressive contrasted with the parched landscapes around them.

CANTANKEROUS CALICHE

The Challenge: Ever sunk a shovel into the ground and heard the loud *clang* of impenetrable rock? Southwestern gardeners constantly contend with caliche (kuh-LEE-chay), a layer of soil that's been cemented together by calcium carbonate. It can be a thin crust or a layer several feet thick. The chance of striking caliche makes new plantings an adventure in the Southwest.

The Solution: Because caliche prevents plants from establishing healthy root systems and water from draining properly, southwestern gardeners have to punch through it. The planting hole should ideally be as deep as the root ball and four to five times as wide. "The goal is to get perennial roots to grow out horizontally in the soil where oxygen is available and water can be applied," Marisa says.

The Rewards: Desert gardening is tough, but not impossible. Resilient and charming plants support bountiful wildlife, including more hummingbird species than anywhere else in the States. Southwestern gardeners are thoughtful and dedicated stewards of their land, and are rewarded with spectacular gifts every day. ●

Jill Staake lives in Tampa, Florida, where gardeners face their own challenges, like stifling humidity—and sand instead of soil. She loves it anyway.

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Ask the Experts

Pros identify mystery plants and give insight into bird behavior.

Q I love catbirds, but they seem to leave by mid-July. Where are they going?

Barbara Keefer MARMORA, NEW JERSEY

Kenn and Kimberly: Catbirds are spring and early summer favorites. But in many places, they become much harder to find by midsummer. They don't start migrating south that early. However, they become much quieter after their young have left the nest and learned to fly, and they often disperse far away from their nesting territories. In late summer, catbirds may move to areas of woodland or dense thickets to look for wild fruits and berries. They spend their time fattening up to prepare for migration, and by the end of summer they may start moving south.

DOWN LOW

Look for gray catbirds close to the ground. They nest in short shrubs and often hop along the forest floor.



Q This insect doesn't quite look like a dragonfly or butterfly. Can you ID it?

Kalwant Grewal ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA

Kenn and Kimberly: This is an insect that's sure to cause a little confusion, because it's a moth that mimics a wasp. It's called the oleander moth or polka-dot wasp moth, a tropical species that's widespread in Florida. As one of its names suggests, its caterpillars eat the leaves of oleander bushes. The adults are active in the daytime, visiting a wide variety of flowers. Predators leave them alone because they look so much like wasps.

Q I'd like to grow more of this mystery plant. What is it and how can I get it to spread?

Susan Hockett URBANNA, VIRGINIA



Melinda: You don't need to worry about having enough to fill your garden! This aggressive native beauty is known as obedient plant. However, its spread is rather disobedient, so place it where you can easily control its growth and regularly pull unwanted plants to keep it in check. The plant got its name because the individual flowers obediently stay in place for a short while when you bend them. Plant it in full or partial sun in Zones 3 to 9 for best results. Use it in the background or combine it with other vigorous growers to create informal gardens.



Q What is this bird?

Wayne Bridges DELAVAN, ILLINOIS

Kenn and Kimberly: You have a lucky sighting there. This pint-size, active bird is a blue-gray gnatcatcher. It's usually hard to see because it spends most of its time flitting about among tree foliage. A gnatcatcher is identified by its very small size, overall gray color and the relatively long black tail with white outer tail feathers. Several members of this group live in the Southwest, but the blue-gray gnatcatcher is the only one found in eastern North America.

Q How do I feed songbirds without attracting squirrels and hawks?

Mary Malpezzi LONGMONT, COLORADO

Kenn and Kimberly: Unexpected guests diminish the enjoyment of bird feeding. Discourage squirrels with a baffle. Visit a bird feeding store and ask for help selecting one—many different kinds are effective in keeping squirrels off feeders. Regarding hawks, it's important to remember that they have to eat to survive, like our favorite songbirds do. Hawks are native wildlife, so we mustn't do anything to harm them. Place feeders close to natural cover so birds can dive in when a hawk approaches. If a hawk is persistent, take your feeders down for a while until it moves on.

TOO MANY BLOOMS *If a plant is potentially aggressive, think about how it reproduces before choosing a strategy to keep it in check. For example, self-seeding flowers stay put with deadheading, while plants with runners are best grown in beds with solid borders.*

Q Is it normal for goldfinches to pluck the petals from black-eyed Susan flowers?

Allen Bodenschatz ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

Kenn and Kimberly: Goldfinches are seed-eating birds and therein lies the answer to your interesting question. We have seen finches plucking petals from flowers in our yard as well. But they're not actually eating the petals. They're plucking the petals to get access to the tasty seeds. We've heard a few people express concern about the damage to their flowers, but we think the finches are just as beautiful as the flowers so it seems like a fair trade. We hope you agree!

FINCH FAVES

Goldfinches eat seeds from a variety of plants, such as lettuce, zinnias and sunflowers. Make your yard even more appealing to them by putting out a thistle seed feeder.





Q I found this plant on an abandoned homestead in Missouri. Can you identify it?

Lisa Danielson BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

Melinda: It's not surprising you found this plant, hardy in Zones 3 to 8, on an old unused lot. Soapwort (*Saponaria officinalis*) is often found in neglected spaces, fields and roadsides. You discovered the double flowering cultivar Flore Pleno. In the past, the sap from soapwort roots was mixed with water to create a gentle cleaner. This aggressive plant is a bit weedy, as it thrives in poor soils and is drought tolerant, and deer tend to leave it be.

Q How do I control an abundance of grasshoppers in my garden?

Marge Berger NECEDAH, WISCONSIN

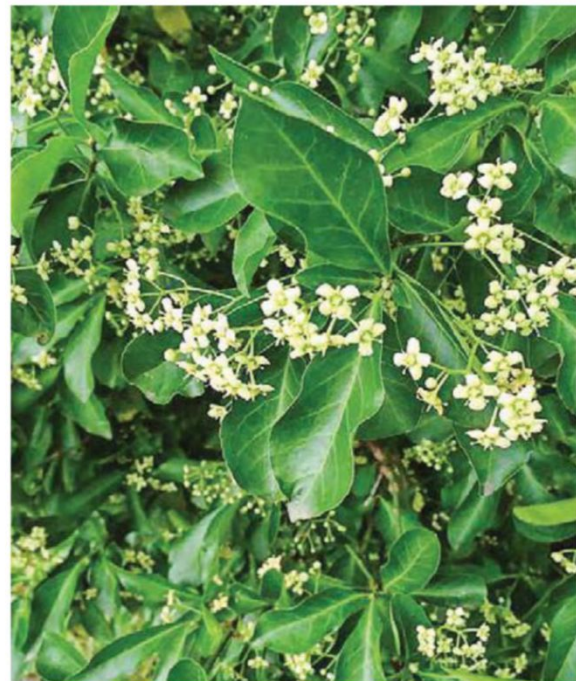
Melinda: Mobile grasshoppers are difficult to control.

They lay their eggs in relatively dry, undisturbed sites and remain in this stage over winter. As they hatch, they move into gardens and fields where they feed on plants. Very dry winters and springs, as well as cold wet weather, reduce populations. But the insecticides labeled for the job also kill other insects, both beneficial and harmful ones.

Semaspore bait is an organic control option.

The active ingredient, *Nosema locustae*, is a naturally occurring single-cell protozoan that kills

developing grasshoppers as well as mole, Mormon and field crickets. Apply around the garden you are trying to protect, following the instructions on the label, and sprinkle in and around the area for control. Young grasshoppers eat the bait and eventually die.



Q My daughter lives in Ohio and saw this shrub. What is it?

Carol Johnston PORTLAND, INDIANA

Melinda: Your daughter found a spreading euonymus (*Euonymus kiautschovicus*). It grows 8 to 10 feet tall, is hardy in Zones 5 to 8 and evergreen or semi-evergreen in milder regions. The dark green leaves are often tinged with red in winter. Vinegary fragrant flowers that appear in July and August attract flies and bees, so place this plant where insects won't create a nuisance. The fruit is similar to other euonymus and its close relative, bittersweet. The pink fruit capsules split open to reveal an orange-red seed. It is less susceptible to euonymus scale than some of the other species, and experts at Virginia Tech say it "is not known to widely escape cultivation."

Q Why won't the wisteria my in-laws gave us bloom?

Constance Young ALBURTIS, PENNSYLVANIA

Melinda: Your in-laws probably shared a piece of their Japanese or Chinese wisteria. Normally these plants produce long, fragrant flowers before the leaves appear. Unfortunately, the buds are not reliably hardy in colder regions—mature plants may only bloom after mild winters. These vines are invasive in some states, so try native options like American and Kentucky wisteria instead. They aren't as showy, but are more reliable for northern gardeners.



Q How do you keep woodpeckers from attacking wooden siding?

Robyn Long GREENLAND, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Kenn and Kimberly: Discouraging woodpeckers is a challenge, but there are a few things you can try. Reflective streamers are the most effective, but any item that moves or flutters makes a good deterrent. Create these streamers yourself by cutting a mylar balloon or aluminum foil into thin strips, taping them to a small dowel rod, and attaching it to the top of any area that you want to protect from the woodpeckers. Keep in mind that if the woodpeckers keep coming back to one spot, the wood may be infested with some kind of wood-boring insects.

Q How do I keep ants out of my dried mealworms?

Liza Peniston AUGUSTA, KANSAS

Kenn and Kimberly: We suggest offering the mealworms in a tray feeder hung from a metal hook, and adding an ant moat. This is a shallow cup that surrounds the hanger, and as long as it's filled with water, ants won't cross it. This might require a bit of trial and error, but visit a store that specializes in bird feeding. They're sure to have some supplies to make this configuration work and prevent the ants from infiltrating your mealworms.

MEET THE EXPERTS



Kimberly and Kenn Kaufman are the duo behind the Kaufman Field Guide Series. They speak and lead bird trips all over the world.



Melinda Myers, a nationally known, award-winning garden expert and TV/radio host, has written more than 20 books.





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2018 FINALIST
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RALEIGH,
NORTH CAROLINA

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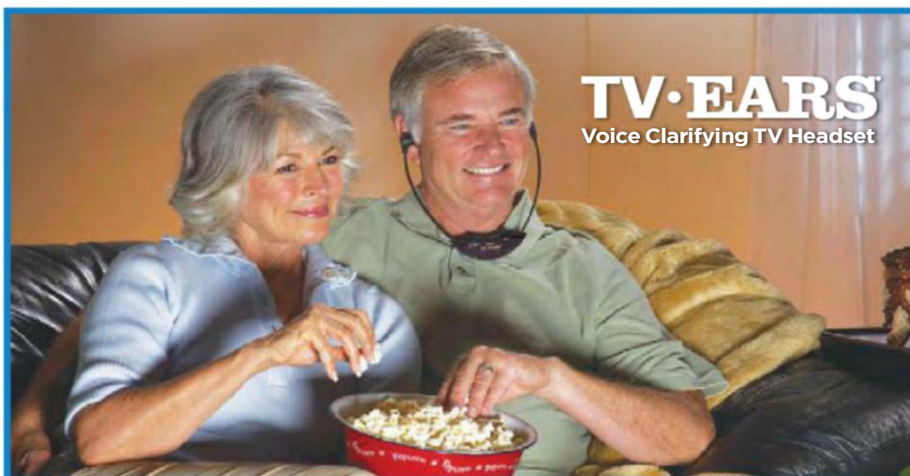
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The State of Monarchs

Explore the silver lining of butterflies in limbo. **BY RACHEL MAIDL**

Monarchs are among the most recognizable and best loved butterflies in North America. But you may have noticed fewer of them traveling through your garden over the last couple of years.

It's true that monarch numbers have declined recently, and that decline is more extreme in some places than others—but, luckily, it's not all bad news.

Researchers split monarchs into two groups at the Rockies: eastern and western. They're not distinct species, but their migration paths and overwintering habitats differ. And one group may be more robust and healthy than the other.

In the East, monarchs appear to be rebounding for the first time in years. Some researchers counted a 144% increase in overwintering monarchs in late 2018, the highest numbers recorded since 2006.

Emma Pelton, a conservation biologist leading the monarch programs at the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, says, "It's worth celebrating, but we also have to be really cautious that it was a 'Goldilocks' weather year."

Conditions in 2018 were just right for monarchs, which may have caused the bump in their numbers, but it will take a few years to confirm whether the butterfly population is actually on an upswing.

Western monarchs didn't share their eastern cousins' success last year—their numbers have been dwindling since the 1980s, when their wintering population was 4.5 million. Last year, fewer than 29,000 wintered there. That means for every 160 monarchs in the West 40 years ago, there's only one today.

But there's reason to hope for West Coast monarchs. The Xerces Society and other organizations with similar goals are pushing to restore and protect overwintering, breeding and migration habitat throughout the West and into Mexico. And they may have Mother Nature on their side.

Rain in early winter caused a colorful "super bloom" in the Southwest. The unofficial

term refers to a recent burst of California poppies and other native wildflowers.

"There's been just an explosion of flowers," Emma says. Biologists aren't sure how many monarchs benefited from the blooms, but some butterflies that overwintered in Southern California probably passed through the area.

Weather plays a large part in conservation, but there's plenty gardeners can do to help, too. Planting natives and choosing natural control solutions for weeds and pests go a long way in sustaining the beloved monarch.

All monarchs start their lives on milkweed; it's the only plant on which adults lay their eggs and caterpillars happily munch. Consider planting one of the many local varieties of milkweed in your garden to get an up-close view of their life cycle.

Support adult monarchs on their long journeys south by growing nectar-rich flowers that bloom from late summer into fall. And be mindful when using insecticides and herbicides, which are strongly linked to insect and pollinator declines.

"People may not see monarchs this year in the West," Emma says. But she urges everyone to be patient for their return and to keep an eye out for other pollinators.

Rachel enjoys watching butterflies visit the chive blooms in her city plot.

GO ABOVE AND BEYOND

Get everyone in your community involved in monarch conservation by encouraging your neighbors to plant milkweed and other natives, participate in citizen science projects and butterfly counts, or work with local officials to protect natural areas. Visit xerces.org for more ideas and information.

What to Plant

Common milkweed quickly takes over small spaces, so look for less aggressive species.

Try growing:

- Swamp milkweed
 - Butterfly milkweed
 - Purple milkweed
 - Sullivant's milkweed
 - Green milkweed
-

Monarch
on swamp
milkweed





Schwabacher Landing is home to wetland wildlife.



Wyoming's Wild Side

Three must-see stops within Grand Teton National Park.

BY LISA BALLARD

1 Pass historic **Mormon Row** along Antelope Flats Road to see northern harriers, sage grouse, sage thrashers, American kestrels and sparrows—plus moose, bison, pronghorn and elk. Stay at least 25 yards from all wildlife, 100 yards from wolves and bears.

2 See trumpeter swans at **Oxbow Bend** on the Snake River. Fish congregate in this lazy stretch of water, also attracting eagles, herons, white pelicans, mergansers and ospreys. Or watch sandhill cranes stroll across nearby **Willow Flats**.

3 Take a ferry ride across **Jenny Lake**, then walk less than a mile to **Hidden Falls**, a spectacular 80-foot cascade. Go early to avoid the crowds. Or hike 2.5 miles from the **Jenny Lake Visitor Center** to enjoy the trailside songbirds and wildflowers.



Find ospreys fishing along park rivers and lakes.

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What is your favorite butterfly?

From classic monarchs to bright swallowtails, discover readers' most beloved winged visitors.

Mourning cloaks are my favorite because they are native and one of the first fliers to appear in my spring gardens. They're stunningly beautiful—dark coloring accented with cream edges and blue dots.

Joanne Wallace WEST BARNSTABLE, MASSACHUSETTS

Zebra longwings are special to me because I introduced my granddaughter to them.

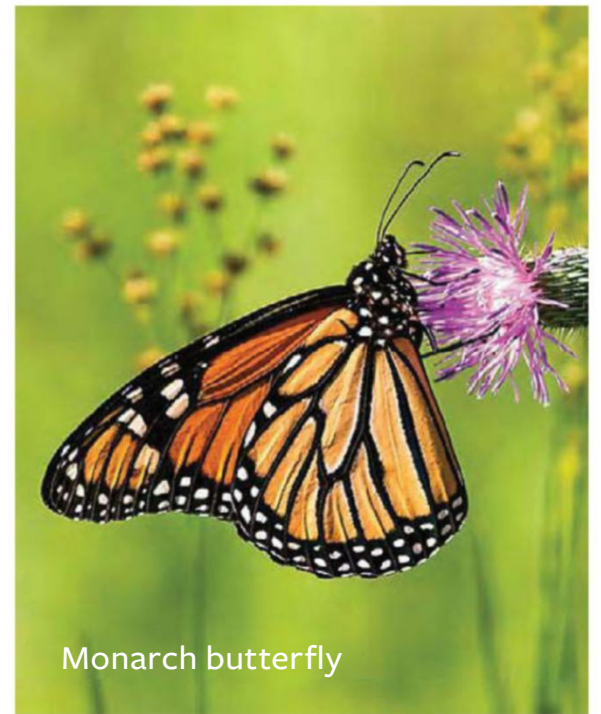
Richard Dupere WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

I like dainty sulphurs for their coloration and tiny size. **Beth Wiechman** SEDGWICK, KANSAS



Zebra swallowtail

I think all butterflies are beautiful, but the zebra swallowtail is my favorite. When I'm taking photos in my garden, their red markings always catch my eye. **Janine Neiswender** ENOLA, PENNSYLVANIA



Monarch butterfly

Monarchs have a very special place in my heart. I was blessed to live near an overwintering site in California, where lots of milkweed grew.

KC Primbs
SALEM, OREGON

My favorite has to be the black swallowtail. The soft teal and yellow markings against the night black background are absolutely striking. I feel lucky every time one visits my yard.

Tammy Merrill SOLON, MAINE

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GULL AND PELICAN: PETER BRANNON

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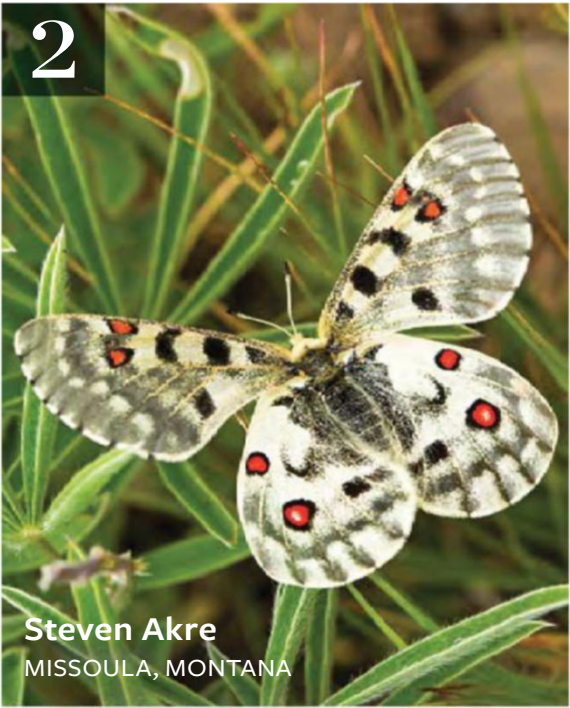
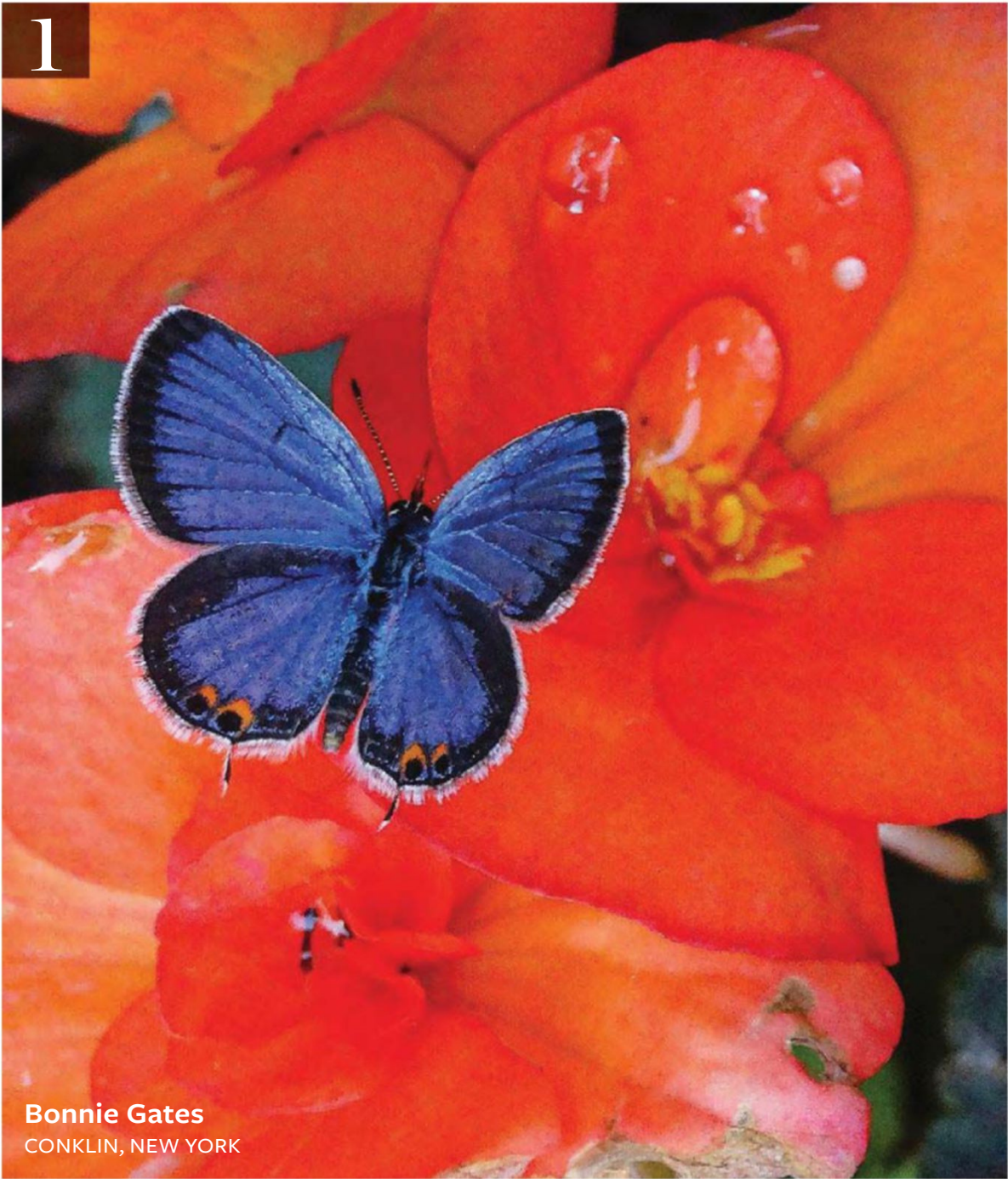
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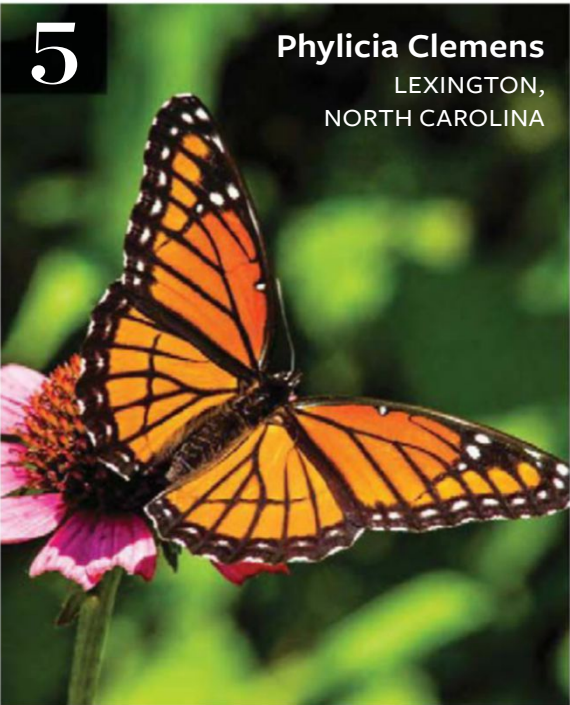
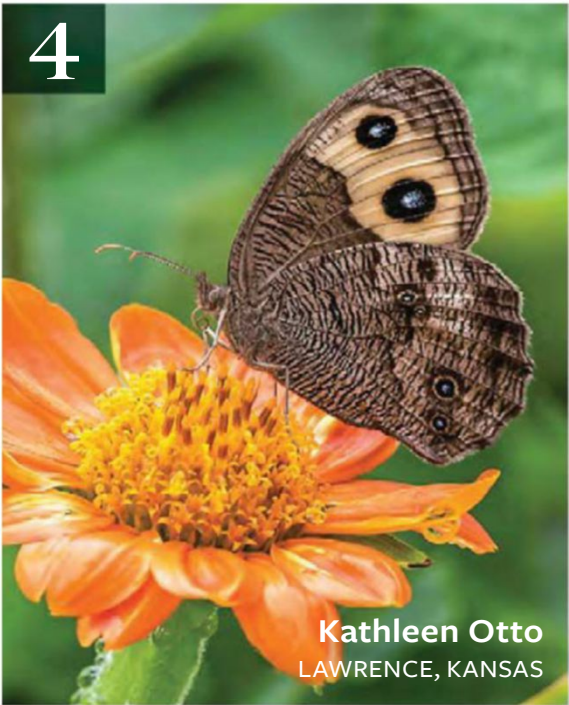
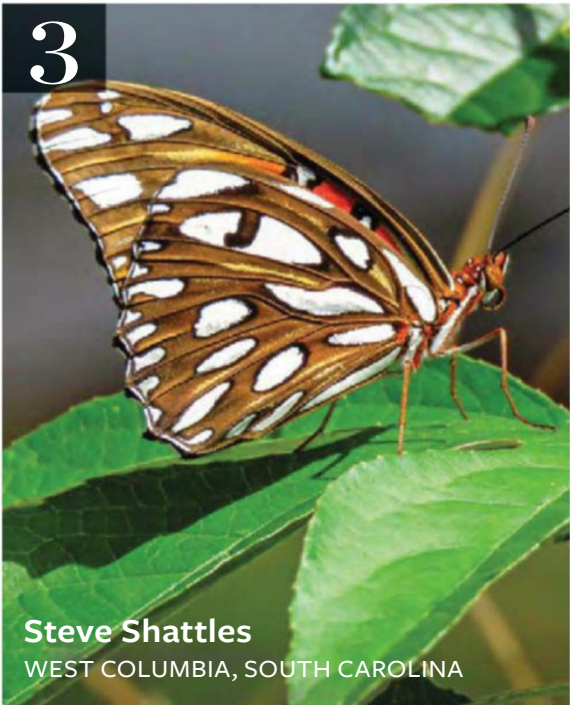


True or False?

A. **MONARCH AND VICEROY** butterflies look nearly identical.

B. **ALL BUTTERFLIES** go through metamorphosis, the process that takes a small egg to an adult flier.

C. **YOU CAN LURE** more butterflies to your yard with rotting fruit, animal dung and nectar-filled blooms.



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What you'll get: If we print your submission in the magazine, we will send you a complimentary copy of the issue in which it appears, and any compensation as may be specified by us in writing.

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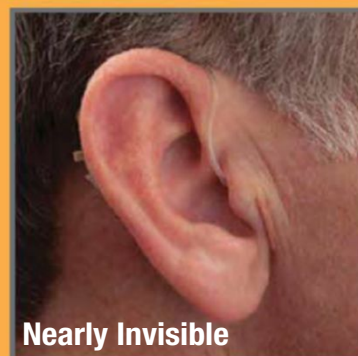
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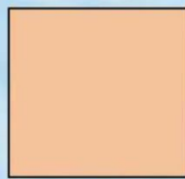
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Bee-hind the Buzz

Learn the sweet truth about these honey producers.

BY RACHEL MAIDL



Hives have a very strict social structure composed of three groups: queens, workers and drones. There's only one queen in healthy hives, plus 2,000 to 60,000 female workers that collect pollen and keep the hive running, and up to 500 larger male drones whose main job is to mate with the queen bee.

20 *There are more than 20 subspecies of western honeybee, none of which are native to North America. They spread here after being brought from Europe, the Middle East and Africa.*



7 *The life span of a bee depends on where it falls within the colony. Queens live up to seven years; workers born in spring or early summer live only five to six weeks.*

2,000
Queen bees are the only females that reproduce. The pheromones they release prevent worker bees from making eggs, so the queen remains the mother and star of the hive. On any given day, a queen bee is able to lay up to 2,000 eggs.

20 *Honeybees have four wings, which they use to fly up to 20 mph. Their speed and stamina allow them to forage for pollen up to 2 miles away from the hive.*

1 Pollinators like bees are crucial in agriculture, affecting one out of every three bites of food we eat. So it's important for gardeners to support them. Grow native plants and avoid insecticides!

TOP: SIMUN ASCIC/SHUTTERSTOCK; BOTTOM: ANNA MORRISON

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